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**CHUFFED TO BITS** Ivan Hollingsworth after his 24-hour, 100-mile run at Tynemouth Longsands raising funds for the Children's Heart Unit Fund (CHUF) at the Freeman Hospital, Newcastle, which saved his son Seb after he suffered heart problems. Seb and Ivan's wife Nadine were waiting at the finish

# The rock behind runner

**O**N June 15 Nadine Hollingsworth will carry the Olympic flame as it journeys around the UK.

The 35-year-old will step out for her own five minutes of Olympic glory somewhere in North Shields (she hasn't been told exactly where yet) on what everyone hopes will be a sunny mid-June afternoon.

She will then take her place in the long and illustrious history of the modern Olympic Games alongside the 7,999 other inspirational people chosen from across Britain who will have helped the flame make its journey from Penzance to London for the opening ceremony through 1,024 cities, towns and villages.

It says much about Nadine that she

**Behind every great man, they say, there stands a woman. For marathon charity runner Ivan Hollingsworth, that woman is wife Nadine. JANE HALL reports**

is feeling guilty about the honour that has been bestowed on her. She believes it should be her husband Ivan, 36, carrying the torch.

"Ivan was nominated by lots of people," says Nadine from Monkseaton, North Tyneside. "I got one nomination and I was the one chosen. I feel really bad. But Ivan is delighted for me and thinks it is hilarious as it puts me in the spotlight.

"He is actually putting money on me falling over or setting fire to

myself." Being the centre of attention is not something that comes easily to Nadine.

There can be few people in the North East now who haven't heard of Ivan and his marathon (literally) efforts to raise money for the children's hospital which helped save their three-year-old son Seb's life.

Most recently he ran 100 miles in just 24 hours without sleep from Eyemouth in the Scottish Borders to Tynemouth over the Easter weekend, raising £8,000 for the Children's

Heart Unit Fund (CHUF) at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital.

But Nadine, while not necessarily shunning the limelight, much prefers to see her husband making the headlines as he notches up the miles in aid of their own Seb4Chuf charity.

However, Ivan, a pharmaceutical rep who represented Great Britain as a student athlete in both the 800m and 1500m until injury cut short his top-flight running career, is the first to admit that without Nadine's support, he may not have been able

to continue with his gruelling feats of endurance.

"I certainly never underestimate the sacrifices Nadine makes for me. I started training six months before I did the 100-mile run. That has a huge impact on us and family life.

"Nadine is critical. But what we do do as a partnership. Nadine is not critically important to support me, she is critically important to the success of Seb4Chuf.

"When I said to Nadine last September that I wanted to run 100 miles in 24 hours, the look she gave me was like I had two heads.

"But one of the things I can do well is run and when your son is born with a potentially life-threatening condition



From 23 you think, 'If I can run a few miles and raise some money then let's do it.'

"Nadine is extremely supportive and realises that together we can do some good. When I was at my lowest ebb at 3am on the 100-mile run, if Nadine hadn't been in the support car and hadn't been there to give me a hug and show me pictures of Seb, I don't know how I could have finished.

"It is wrong for me to take the sole credit when I couldn't do it without Nadine."

Ivan's words will no doubt bring tears to Nadine's eyes. A self-effacing woman, she genuinely doesn't think her physical and emotional support for her husband as he takes on challenge after challenge for Seb4Chuf marks her out as special.

She believes any partner - male or female - who had sat and watched as their son fought for his life, would do the same.

But raising money as a thank-you through the odd raffle, charity evening or even fun run is one thing. Taking it to the Herculean heights that Ivan has is quite another.

Since Seb was diagnosed with the congenital heart defect Tetralogy of Fallot when he was just 15 hours old in 2009 (if left untreated he would not have survived to his second birthday), Ivan has completed three Great North Runs, both the

London and Edinburgh marathons, cycled and run all 140 miles of the C2C over five days twice, ridden it in its entirety once and completed his epic 100-mile battle.

That's not to mention a host of other runs and physical trials he has completed on behalf of Seb4Chuf.

Nadine hasn't been idle either, however, on the money-raising front. She too has done the London Marathon and joined Ivan on the Great North Runs, collection buckets in hand ("we hadn't appreciated how heavy they would get with all the coppers, so the second year we pushed a pram we could tip the money into"), and is currently in the midst of organising her third black tie ball for Seb4Chuf which will take place on August 15 at the Close House Hotel in Northumberland.

Between them they have raised a phenomenal £185,000 to help buy vital life-saving equipment for the children's heart unit.

But while organising a ball is stressful (luckily Nadine has a core group of friends and family who rally round every year to help, including the actor Ben Shephard), Ivan's increasingly daring exploits might well have torn apart a less stable and loving relationship.

Over a coffee as she relaxes following a maths exam (she is currently undertaking an access to university course so she can train to be a primary school teacher), Nadine confesses that she once told Ivan "I couldn't see us having a family if he was still a competitive runner as it was taking up so much of his time.

"Now look what's happened - he is training more now than he ever was!

"I wouldn't have it any other way, though. I support Ivan 100%. We don't have a volatile relationship.

We don't really argue. We are just really good mates and we don't tend to fall out. Perhaps it is because we have been through so much together with Seb.

"But we both feel it is

important that we support CHUF in whatever way we can. Watching your child fighting for their life in intensive care is the really tough part."

Nadine has literally been with Ivan every step of the way since he began his unique money-raising endeavours.

It all started when Seb was still in hospital, as Nadine recalls. "Ivan had signed up to do the Tresco Marathon in the Isles of Scilly in aid of spina bifida.

"Obviously with Seb being so ill I couldn't go, so I said to Ivan, 'If you are going, you had better win,' which he did. It was just after that that we were looking at the equipment they had on Ward 23 and wondering how much it all cost and how they got the money to buy it.

"We both said we would do whatever we could to help raise cash, and it all went from there really."

As Ivan dreams up each new and ever more daring act, it is Nadine who keeps the home running, offers a shoulder to cry on when needed, makes sure the cups of tea and snacks keep coming on the fundraising trail and generally ties up all the loose ends.

"I work three days a week and Ivan works full-time, so I do what I can to look after him and Seb. Ivan's training takes up a lot of time so it is up to me to ensure that he doesn't have to think about anything other than work or his training.

"We have always been a partnership. He has always trained really hard. When we first met he was still competing so he used to train every day other than Sunday, so life has always been like that.

"Even when he

was injured he was still doing a lot of crazy stuff to get him through."

On the actual challenges it is Nadine who follows behind in the support vehicle, ensuring everything runs smoothly, offering sustenance and sympathy and making sure nothing is left behind.

When Ivan ran non-stop for 24 hours, Nadine spent days baking vegetarian pasties. "Out of the blue Ivan said he wanted vegetarian pasties. I had never made them before so I ended up having a mammoth cooking fest.

"I don't think there is enough I can do for him. He is my husband, I love him and I am very proud of what he is doing."

The 100-miler over Easter did almost stretch Nadine to the limits of even her own endurance and patience, however. "It was ridiculous and absolutely crazy. Ivan was tired from

training and I was tired from looking after Seb.

"There were times when I thought, 'Come on, what are you doing?', but then you realise it just has to be the way it is.

"For the 100-mile challenge, Ivan didn't want anyone else helping him but me, but I did have to say I couldn't drive safely for 24 hours with him. I pulled together a terrific support team.

"It was the hardest and most harrowing thing that Ivan and I have done. For Ivan it was the physical pain, for me it was watching him putting himself through it."

The worst moment has been tending to Ivan's bloody and blistered feet. "I'm really squeamish and his feet are pretty grim at the moment. I have to say that dealing with those is beyond the call of a wife's duties!"



**CELEBRITY SUPPORT** TV presenter Ben Shephard and Ivan Hollingsworth at the start of the coast-to-coast charity bike/run in aid the CHUF charity

**PAYING A DEBT** Left, Ben Shephard with Nadine and Ivan Hollingsworth and Seb; above, Nadine took her turn at the action; and top, the family after Ivan skied 10km in a mankini to raise money for CHUF

